

Native American bees are honeys

They've swooped in to do pollination duties of depleted honeybees.

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Native American bees have stepped in to do the pollination work of the nation's dwindling supply of honeybees.

And they appear to be saving crops in some areas, say Auburn University researchers and bee experts in Arizona and Maine.

Honeybees took a beating last spring from mites, pesticides and bad weather, accelerating a five-year decline in their population.

Scientists feared that would mean a shortage this year of pumpkins, apples, cranberries, almonds and other fruits and nuts.

But bumblebees and other native varieties are picking up the slack.

The honeybee originally came from Europe. All the wild honeybees in U.S. woods are descendants of those European bees, and up to 90 percent of them in some regions were wiped out by an epidemic of mites.

Pollination between a male and female flower is necessary to make a fruit. Bees unwittingly do this as they crawl into flower after flower

in search of pollen.

"I was concerned that we might see a shortfall of pollination, especially since in my own garden, which is in a woods setting, I had to pollinate the squash by hand," said James Cane, an Auburn bee expert.

In August, when Cane and Auburn graduate students T'ai Roultson and Blair Sampson walked the

rows of an Alabama pumpkin patch, they found native bumblebees foraging for nectar and pollen in the flowers of the pumpkins.

The bumblebees averaged nine bees per hundred flowers and accounted for half the bee visitors, Cane said. There also were honeybees, sweat bees, leaf-cutting bees and squash bees.

Field sampling in Arizona and Maine in late summer and fall found a similar result: Where native bees persist in sufficient numbers in the natural vegetation next

to crop lands, they can do enough pollination to set fruit, even when honeybees are absent.

It's possible for farmers and gardeners to help — or hurt — the native bees that Stephen Buchmann, a researcher at the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum, calls the "forgotten pollinators."

Bees are active in the mornings, so delaying the spraying of any pesticide until evening will help protect them.

While bumblebees in Alabama handled most of the pollination of

pumpkins and late planting squash, the early planting of squash that flowered in June largely pollinated by squash researchers said.

Bee experts estimate that percent to 90 percent of the honeybees in the United States have disappeared from hollis trunks and rock crevices in fields and deserts in recent years.

The devastation sends a clear message, said Cane: "Pollination not something you should take for granted."

SLC beekeeper has honey of a profession, except for stings

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Beekeeper John Storey knows what it's like to be stung.

Not so much by his bees, but by the crazy financial swings in a honey-producing business he believes is underpaid, under supported and under appreciated.

Storey, a regular fixture each fall at the Murray Farmers Market, works some 400 beehives from Lehi, South Jordan and Tooele to eastern Salt Lake City and as far away as Fort Bridger, Wyo.

But most Fridays and Saturdays, you can find him at the market or one of his roadside locations peddling the sweet fruits of his labors to produce shoppers.

"Want to try some honey?" Storey asks a box of snack crackers in one hand and plastic container of thick golden liquid in the other. "This honey is from Lehi ... the other is from South Jordan."

The two types look the same, but the tasters quickly learn there is a major difference in flavor. The South Jordan honey has a zesty flavor with more bite, while the Lehi version has the blander taste most people have become accustomed to with store-bought honey.

Honey buyers pay a few cents more than they would in the store, but Storey's honey is fresh, flavorful and locally produced at his home extraction facility in Salt Lake City.

"Flavors can vary geographically ... even with hives as little as a mile apart," he explained. "It just depends what combination of flowers the bees are working on."



LAURA SEITZ/The Associated Press

Money on the wing: John Storey wears protective clothing as he collects pollen from a beehive. He sells the pollen as well as the honey which the bees produce.